

Finding the Time and Space to Be Together

By Janelle Durham, MSW. Parent Educator for Bellevue College. <http://bellevuetoddlers.wordpress.com>

Take time every day to connect as a couple

Even a few minutes a day can make a big difference to a relationship. Carolyn Pirak, from Bringing Baby Home recommends: When you separate each morning, spend at least two minutes saying goodbye. When you reunite, spend 20 minutes talking about your days. Take five minutes a day to express appreciation and 8 minutes to show affection. (www.parentmap.com/article/make-time-for-your-partner)

8 minute date ideas

It may be hard to predict when you'll find those minutes for showing affection, but you can commit to seizing those moments when they come. Have a list of ideas for "8 minute dates." That way, when a moment comes, you don't have to be creative. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- ⌚ Put on a piece of music, and dance for one song.
- ⌚ Rub each other's necks for a few minutes each. End with a full body hug.
- ⌚ Tell your partner what you most appreciate about him/her.
- ⌚ Step outside, and look at the moon and the stars.
- ⌚ Snuggle up on the couch, and talk about a happy memory.
- ⌚ Slow down. Just take a few deep breaths, and stop running frantically.
- ⌚ Go for a short walk – talk about your dreams together.

Date Nights

Prioritize finding time for you as a couple. Ideally, this is a "real date" (remember those? It's time by yourselves, away from other responsibilities, and other interruptions). It doesn't have to be anything fancy. Just a chance to be together, really listen to each other, really see the other person, and remember why you chose to spend your lives together. Celebrate being a couple!

(If you can't make a full date night work, try to set aside one evening a week where you commit to squeezing in an hour of date time at home – maybe after kids are in bed for the night.)

To maximize the benefits: Spend time talking about what your expectations are, and what each of you most needs from the time together. Knowing each other's priorities helps ensure they're met.

Sometimes as parents, the best laid plans for a date can fall apart (you have a sick child, screaming baby, you're too tired to do what you planned...) Have a plan for contingencies: if X happens, what will we do? Have alternatives planned. Even if the plan fails, it may feel good to have at least tried!

Re-discovering your sex life

As parents of young children, your libido may be down, you may have a hard time figuring out how to fit in a sex life around children who have no respect for the privacy of your room, or you may be just too tired to think about sex! Here are some hints for easing your way into lovemaking.

- Start slow: try starting with cuddling, snuggles, hugs, or massage. Try not to feel any pressure to take it further for a while.
- Find other ways to express love for each other, in love languages you each hear best.
- If you're ready for everything, and your partner isn't ready for anything, then masturbation may help you meet some of your needs.
- "Quickies". If it's hard to find time or energy for a whole love-making "session", try: a little oral sex, some fondling, or even giving an intense kiss with your *full* attention.
- If your child sleeps in your room, or your bed, you may not be able to make love there. Remember, there are many other rooms in your house!